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ABSTRACT

This paper concerns a study conducted to determine: where fundamental authority for undergraduate admissions policy lies; to what extent the chief admissions officer influences policy; whether a shift from one policy maker to another has been observed; and which constituent groups should be involved in formulating admissions policy. A questionnaire was sent to the chief admissions officer at 226 colleges and universities in all sections of the country. The 118 institutions that responded were grouped, according to their own descriptions, into: state universities, private universities, and private colleges. Tables illustrate discussion of the responses. (JS)

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AUTHORITY AND ADMISSIONS POLICY AT 118 AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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This study regarding authority for admissions policy was, in a sense, conceived and conducted for the purpose of testing some notions which had been held or suspected to be true. Generally, these suspicions were confirmed, although the differences in response between the three institutional types were somewhat surprising. The information about to be delivered to you surely must not be considered as definitive. One would think the value of this kind of study would be in its suggestive character -- it is my hope that some ambitious reader might follow up this effort with a truly comprehensive analysis of admissions policy and the policy-makers.

- Purposes of the Study -

This study was conducted to determine:

(A) where fundamental authority for undergraduate admissions policy lies,

(B) to what extent the chief admissions officer influences policy,

(C) whether a shift from one policy-maker to another has been observed,

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(D) and finally, which constituent groups should be involved in formulating admissions policy.

- Method -

A questionnaire entitled "The Administrative Level of Policy -- Undergraduate Admissions" was sent to the chief admissions officer of two hundred and twenty-six colleges and universities. The geographical distribution was controlled to insure that all sections of the country would be represented. In all, response was received from one hundred and eighteen institutions or fifty-two percent of the original mailing. (see Table 1)

TABLE 1

NUMBER AND TYPE OF PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

	No. Distributed	No. Received	% Received
State Universities	60	40	67%
Private Universities	106	47	44%
Private Colleges	60	31	52%
All Institutions (total)	226	118	52%

- Definitions and Qualifications -

For the purpose of comparison, the one hundred and eighteen colleges and universities which responded were grouped into three institutional types: state universities, private universities, and private colleges. All institutions were assigned to their particular group on the basis of their own description.

For example, a rather small private institution offering a limited number of master's programs (and in fact more resembling a college than university) was categorized as a private university if it called itself a university. This study did not attempt, in any way, to classify an institution on the basis of the type or quality of programs offered.

While the questionnaire was intended to be completed by the chief admissions officer of each institution, in a few cases an assistant provided the information. This information was included in the study.

Fundamental admissions policy decisions were defined as those policy decisions which decide the basic composition of the undergraduate student body.

- Results -

In response to the question, "Are fundamental admissions policy decisions, those decisions which decide the basic composition of the student body, made by the admissions officer in your institution," private universities most frequently indicated YES with 28% (see Table 11). State university response to this question was comparable to that of the private colleges.

TABLE 11

FUNDAMENTAL ADMISSIONS POLICIES MADE BY THE ADMISSIONS OFFICER

	Yes	%	No	%	No Response	%
State Universities	7	18%	31	77%	2	5%
Private Universities	13	28%	32	68%	2	4%
Private Colleges	6	19%	19	62%	6	19%
All Institutions (total)	26	22%	82	69%	10	9%

If the chief admissions officer does not have responsibility for deciding fundamental admissions policy, where does this authority lie? A very high proportion of vague answers (or no answers) prevents us from accurately identifying specific sources of authority (see Table 111). What emerges of value here is the rather remarkable range indicated for faculty participation.

TABLE 111

WHERE DOES AUTHORITY FOR ADMISSIONS POLICY PRESENTLY LIE?

	Faculty Committee	%	Admin. Officer or Board	%	Vague	%
State Universities	19	47%	10	25%	11	28%
Private Universities	28	60%	1	2%	18	38%
Private Colleges	24	77%	0	0%	7	23%
All Institutions (total)	71	60%	11	9%	36	31%

The third question posed to the admissions officer was "If the admissions officer is not the primary policy decision-maker, to what extent does he influence policy and the decision-maker?" The results of this question may be seen in Table IV. Two interesting points may be made. The first is that the admissions officer appears to be much more influential in private colleges than state universities or private universities (see "Great Extent" column, Table IV). This view could be moderated somewhat, however, if one combines the "Great Extent" response with the "Considerable Extent" response. With this composite grouping private colleges record 58%, state universities 45%, and private universities 44%. In addition, the

very high percentage of "vague or no replies" might indicate that this is perhaps one of the more sensitive areas for the admissions officer in his relations with the institution.

TABLE IV

EXTENT TO WHICH THE CHIEF ADMISSIONS OFFICER INFLUENCES POLICY

	Great Extent	%	Considerable Extent	%	Little or no influence	%	Vague or No reply	%
State Universities	5	12%	13	33%	1	2%	21	53%
Private Universities	11	23%	10	21%	0	0%	26	56%
Private Colleges	13	42%	5	16%	2	7%	11	35%
All Institutions (total)	29	24%	28	23%	3	3%	58	50%

The fourth item of the questionnaire asked, "Do you perceive a significant change or shift from one policy-maker to another in your institution?" Uniformity of response characterized the results of this question (see Table V). From one atypical state university reply the responding official indicated, "Yes, in multi-campus state institutions, where presently one set of rules guides all, it seems likely that some of them will move toward local differentiation."

TABLE V

SHIFT FROM ONE POLICY-MAKER TO ANOTHER

	No	%	Yes	%	No Reply	%
State Universities	36	90%	2	5%	2	5%
Private Universities	41	87%	2	4%	4	9%
Private Colleges	29	94%	2	6%	0	0%
All Institutions (total)	106	90%	6	5%	6	5%

In an effort to get at the role of various constituent groups the question was asked, "Where do you think admissions policy authority should lie?" Here we get involved in opinion and attitude. The responses summarized in Table VI tend to jar the notion of 'faculty primacy' in this area of decision-making. Two of the three institutional types (state universities and private universities) judged administration and faculty input on an equal basis. The third type (private colleges) placed administrative input slightly ahead of faculty. In all three institutional types student input was approved by a majority of admissions officers. One must add, however, that the majority of those favoring student input qualified their answers with such comments as "voice yes, vote no."

TABLE VI

PREFERRED ROLE OF CONSTITUENT GROUPS AS PERCEIVED BY THE ADMISSIONS OFFICER

	Faculty	%	Administration	%	Student	%
State Universities	33	82%	33	82%	28	70%
Private Universities	43	92%	43	92%	31	66%
Private Colleges	28	90%	30	97%	24	77%
All Institutions (total)	104	88%	106	90%	83	70%

A final area not directly related to the question of authority for policy was included in the study and the results are recorded in Table VII. Admissions officers were asked "Do you foresee significant changes in admissions policy in the next five years and what form might these changes take?" It is apparent from the response that all three institutional types,

to a considerable extent, are subjected to similar pressures. Few would argue that the manner in which institutions respond to these pressures will significantly influence the role of higher education in America.

TABLE VII

CHANGES FORESEEN IN ADMISSIONS POLICY

	Col. 1	2	3	4	5	6
State Universities	37%	10%	5%	25%	8%	15%
Private Universities	45%	8%	0%	28%	4%	15%
Private Colleges	48%	3%	0%	20%	6%	23%
All Institutions (total)	43%	8%	2%	24%	6%	17%

Col. 1 = No policy changes foreseen (%)
Col. 2 = Yes -- more restrictive policy generally (%)
Col. 3 = Yes -- more restrictive toward transfers (%)
Col. 4 = Yes -- less restrictive to include minority students (%)
Col. 5 = Yes -- miscellaneous
Col. 6 = No reply

It seems obvious that in an exploratory study such as this, the views of 118 admissions officers do not necessarily define the attitude or direction of the institutions they represent. If this study kindles a spark of interest for further and more thorough investigation it will have achieved some measure of its intent. Clearly the issues facing higher education bear direct relation to the admissions officer. As institutions struggle individually and collectively to solve these critical problems -- as they struggle to survive -- the pressure for re-evaluation of the substance and procedure of the admissions area grows more apparent. The manner in which institutional components react to these pressures will determine, to a large measure, the quality and shape of American life and education in the decades ahead.